



By SUSAN F. WOLFERT

Looking at Taylor Matthews, you see a typical Edgemont 13-year-old whose life centers on school, friends, family, art and sports. But if you spend a little time with her, you see not just a typical kid, but also someone with extraordinary talent, grace, strength and compassion.

In the past 18 months, Taylor has declared war against a diagnosis of bone cancer and taken to task a country that vastly underfunds research for childhood cancers. Taylor's fundraising crusade, waged while undergoing multiple surgeries, high-dose chemotherapy and countless hospitalizations, has changed the face of pediatric cancer research, already raising roughly \$300,000.

In May 2003, Taylor was 11 and finishing up sixth grade at the Seely Place School. She had always been active in sports, but began to experience a shortness of breath during rigorous soccer drills. A series of doctor visits ultimately yielded a diagnosis of osteosarcoma.

From the outset, Taylor went into battle. "She cried when she heard the news, but regrouped and said let's go for pizza," said Taylor's father, Bob Matthews. After the pizza, Taylor's ordeal of scans, procedures, medications and transfusions began.

Taylor's parents said that the young patient was a part of every medical decision, fought vigorously to be discharged from every hospitalization and even balked at taking pain medication during a surgical procedure for which she was awake. Once, following surgery, a nurse insisted that Taylor walk more to aid

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—MAGGI LANDAU

her recovery. So, Taylor grabbed her dad and her IV pole and left the building.

Taylor spent the better part of a year in the hospital with her mother, Sue, at her side. Bob said that after his other daughters Ryan (now 15) and Corey (now 10) went to bed, "I would make a pot of coffee and do Internet research on pediatric cancer well into the night." That research generated names of experts, cutting edge technology and a determination to take matters into their own hands.

Armed with a vast arsenal of knowledge, Bob had consultations with doctors nationwide to pursue a collaborative approach to Taylor's treatment. He learned, "Research is focused on single drugs, but the answer is drug cocktails."

After a thorough search, Bob found a team willing to be both creative and aggressive at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in New York. Sue said, "the main thing people should know is that they have choices" when facing medical conditions.

Bob also learned, "Almost every drug in use is merely a drug devel-

oped for adults that happened to have applicability in kids. Even when a drug directed at pediatric cancer is discovered, it may not be produced because there is no money in it for the drug companies."

And because cancer is dramatically more prevalent in adults than in children, researchers have vastly larger adult study groups. "But kids are not small adults. They're different," said Bob. Also, added Sue, "Adult research targets saving lives for 20 or 30 years. With kids, you have to look 70 years ahead."

During the year following Taylor's diagnosis, a vast array of family, friends and neighbors helped manage the Matthews' home front. Bob said, "We didn't make dinner for a year." And Taylor, not content just to endure an excruciating period of surgeries, illness and missing the everyday life of school and friends, focused on finding ways to help others dealing with similar conditions.

Taylor said she was moved by the suffering of other patients she met at the hospital and was bewildered by how underfunded pediatric cancer research is in this country. According to Bob, the United States government spends roughly \$15 per person on all cancer research (a tiny fraction of what it spends on defense, he adds). Of that \$15, pediatric cancer research is allocated approximately 60 cents.

Bob said, "Private donations and philanthropy are all [children with cancer] have. Taylor knows this story first hand and she is determined to change it." So, when family friend and Edgemont resident Jill

Edgemont teen wins war against cancer

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Abraham proposed the idea of Taylor designing hair accessories and selling them to support pediatric cancer research, Taylor jumped on it.

Abraham said, "From the moment Taylor was diagnosed, my answering machine would fill up in an hour with people asking what they could do. I knew there had to be something more than just having people make dinner for them." She added that she thought the idea would give Taylor something fun to do and positive to focus on.

Abraham enlisted the help of Edgemont resident Susan Berman who owns a business designing scarves, belts and hair accessories in Manhattan. Abraham and Berman brought fabric samples to Taylor in the hospital and a new force in the war against cancer was put into motion.

"We worked every day on the logo, the hang tags, the labels and the wording," said Abraham. And, with help from legions of Taylor's friends, the first items of the so-called Tay-bandz line were launched in September 2003.

The Tay-bandz debut took place at Edgemont's back-to-school barbecue and yielded \$6,000 in one night. Berman noted, "Even when Taylor felt miserable, it made her happy to work on Tay-bandz." Taylor's mom added, "Tay-bandz has really been part of the cure."

"After the first sale, I just wanted to keep going," said Taylor. The product line has since been expanded to include

key chains, hats, belts, watches, bracelets, beach bags and flip-flops. Products are sold through the Tay-bandz Web site (www.taybandz.org), at various Edgemont school functions, through several local retailers and at other events arranged by friends and family members.

Tay-bandz is an incorporated, not-for-profit business with Taylor at its helm. Its purpose is to raise money for and awareness of pediatric cancer and, currently, to raise \$1 million for a pediatric cancer lab at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital. Sue noted, "99.5 percent of the Tay-bandz profits go straight to Columbia. We literally hand the check to them."

According to Edgemont resident and Columbia-based pediatric oncologist Julia Glade-Bender, the goal of the lab there is to understand the biology of pediatric solid tumors in an effort to eradicate them. The lab is studying angiogenesis, or the formation of blood vessels that comprise the tumors. Researchers there have endeavored to inhibit the growth of tumors by cutting off the blood vessels' supply of oxygen and nutrition.

Glade-Bender noted that Columbia Presbyterian was recently named one of over 200 hospitals nationwide to share in a \$2.25 million government grant to study oncology in children. "The pie is so small," she said and added that roughly 14,000 kids are diagnosed annually.

Another Edgemont resident instrumental in Tay-bandz is Maggi Landau, who runs the company's business side.

Landau said that Taylor is the "driving force behind Tay-bandz and has incredible ideas and enthusiasm." Even though Landau handles banking, inventory, orders and financial reports, "Taylor knows all the stats and figures," she said.

Landau, who is serving her first year on the Edgemont Board of Education, said she became involved with Tay-bandz a year ago. Landau's husband, Bobby Minter, died from cancer in 2001 and Landau was finalizing the dissolution of his advertising business when a mutual friend introduced her to the Matthews family.

"I fell in love with them immediately. And I needed to stay connected to the cancer community because it had been so helpful to my family," Landau explained. She added, "You can't help but be upbeat when you're exposed to Taylor and her fight."

Landau said that the Edgemont community and school system had been incredibly supportive in the development of Tay-bandz. She noted that another Edgemont resident, Rick Hobish, was invaluable in helping Tay-bandz incorporate and deal with the legal side of the business. "This community is so extraordinary," she said.

While undergoing cancer treatments and developing Tay-bandz, Taylor also kept up with her schoolwork enabling her to enter eighth grade with her class this fall despite having missed a year of school. And, Taylor has undertaken several other fundraising activities as well.

Last May, Taylor rounded up spon-

sors and participants for a 5-mile walkathon to raise money for the Scarsdale-based Pediatric Cancer Foundation, an organization that supports pediatric cancer research at several different hospitals. Taylor's 600 recruits at that event comprised over half of the total turnout and included three busloads of Edgemont participants.

Another recent event was a partnership with retailer Best & Co. in which many Greenwich, Conn., retailers agreed to donate 15 percent of their one-day sales to pediatric cancer research at Columbia Presbyterian. Taylor also invested some Tay-bandz funds in a huge donation of new toys and games at the clinic there.

Taylor is nothing less than a force of nature. Now in remission and with a full schedule of school and extracurricular activities, she is looking ahead to broadening the Tay-bandz line and embarking on other fund- and awareness-raising activities as well.

Taylor developed a green wristband etched with "Kids Curing Cancer" due out in the next few weeks and is working on a program to have other children with cancer design Tay-bandz accessories. She is also seeking corporate partners and thinking of sponsoring a medical student or fellow pursuing pediatric cancer research.

And Taylor no doubt has many other ideas. But she had to leave the interview to go celebrate a friend's bat mitzvah. A typical teenager, indeed.

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